

NSC BRIEFING

8 March 1955

VIETNAMESE ARMY CLASH WITH QUANG TRI "REBELS"

- I. Press reports of 8 March quote "informed sources" in Saigon as stating that fighting has broken out between Government forces and "rebel auxiliary troops" in Annam's Quang Tri province, near the 17th parallel truce demarcation line.
  - A. The Diem Government is reported to have despatched seven crack battalions, supported by armor and artillery, to put down the uprising.
- II. There is no apparent connection between this clash in the north and the chronic friction between Diem and the several armed sects around Saigon, in Cochinchina. Instead, it appears to be a hangover from Diem's dispute with then Chief of Staff Hinh, in Sept-Nov '54.
  - A. Three weeks ago, a Vietnamese army officer, Major Pham Van Bon--commander of 610th Battalion and pro-Hinh in sentiment--deserted his post at Faifo (near the scene of the reported clash) taking some of his troops with him.
  - B. Following this incident, Vietnamese Army units on pacification duty in the area were given the additional mission of capturing the Major and his deserters.
  - C. Because the commander in the area, Colonel Nguyen Quang Hoanh, is violently anti-Hinh and pro-Diem, it was expected that this new mission would be pressed.

III. Picture is further complicated by the ~~alleged~~<sup>2</sup> presence in Quang Tri of a guerrilla group <sup>(ALLEGEDLY)</sup> controlled by the Dai Viet party, a nationalistic group once strong in Tonkin and not represented in Diem's regime.

A. Although the Dai Viet party has not previously carried on armed resistance, reports have stated that the group in Quang Tri totals 2,000 effectives and 4,000 partly trained reservists, who have obtained arms from Viet Minh caches.

B. A possible connection between this "Dai Viet maquis" and the pro-Hinh deserters is provided by a report that, on 4 Feb, the 610th battalion was disarmed and dispersed because of the suspicion that it was aiding the "Dai Viet maquis."

IV. These developments should not have an immediate damaging effect on the stability of the Hinh government. However, the suppression of a "rebel" group in the north could prove a serious drain on the resources of Diem's government, which simultaneously faces emergent dissidence among the sects in the south.